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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires were mailed to 138 students in 55 communities in British Columbia, Alberta, and the Yukon, who had enrolled from their homes in an introductory psychology distance education course; 92 responses were received. In addition to an integrated, open learning course package in print form, students could also watch a weekly one-hour live teleclass hosted and produced by their instructor. Students had toll-free telephone access to their instructor both on the air during the live broadcasts and at his office between telecasts. The results showed students to be very positive about the addition of live, interactive telecasts to distance education offerings. Even compared to other face-to-face learning situations, 92% of respondents rated the course as "good" or "excellent." (Author/GL)

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Student Response to a Distance Education Course Incorporating Live Interactive Television

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Abstract

Questionaires were mailed to 138 students who enrolled in an Introductory Psychology distance education course. In addition to an integrated, print open learning course package, students also could watch a weekly one hour live teleclass hosted and produced by their instructor/tutor. Students had toll-free telephone access to their instructor/tutor both on-air during the live telecasts as well as at his office between telecasts. The results showed students to be very positive about the addition of live, interactive telecasts to distance education offerings. Even compared to other face-to-face learning situations 92% of respondents rated the course as "good" or "excellent".

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Student Response to a Distance Education Course Incorporating Live, Interactive Television

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An analysis of the use of television in distance education reveals three distinct phases. Intially, as Mumshi (1980) has reported, "Traditional television courses have presented a lecturer, supported by a blackboard, artifacts and, perhaps, slides. The teachers on such "television courses" essentially brought their classroom to the television studio. They delivered a talk and supported it, by and large, with reading assignments in their favourite texts" (p.3). Such tele-lectures were not entirely ineffective but, as open learning/ distance education methodology advanced, began to give way to the more elaborate, pre-recorded telecourse.

Telecourses, the second phase in the use of television to reach students at a distance, are produced in consultation with subject experts and may include the latter in "bit parts" but often prefer to use professional television hosts. While some telecourses use the television as the primary vehicle for course content delivery, most form part of an integrated multi-media delivery system including print (containing some or all of text, study guide, and additional readings) and perhaps other (e.g. floppy disk, audio cassette, et cetera, components. Ostman and Wagner (1987) among others have emphasized the value of using multiple communication channels to reach students. Since telecourses are re-usable, and often widely marketable, they can be assigned substantial production budgets.

Numerous studies of the effectiveness of such telecourses (e.g. Schramm 1977) have shown positive results. Shavelson, Webb and Hotta (1987), citing

numerous studies, recently concluded that"...students will learn about as much from a telecourse as from a traditional course" (p.29).

The third, and most recent, use of television in distance education involves using television in a live format and having audio linkage between teacher and student. Whittington (1987) says "Live, interactive televised instruction is that which is offered via satellite or microwave delivery systems in real time to students who have immediate talk-back capability with the instructor" (p.47). He goes on to cite several studies done with students at Stanford, Minot State College and California State (Chico) which gave positive evaluations of live, interactive television. Catchpole and MacGregor (1984) report positive student feedback to a distance education course incorporating print (text, study guide and student manual), telephone tutor, pre-recorded telecourse and live, interactive television components. Persons and Catchpole (1987) report completion rates (counting only those students who submitted the first assignment) of ninety-percent in a live, interactive television course and observed, in an experimental manipulation, that the additional of audio-teleconferences for half of registrants did not significantly boost completion rates. They concluded that the interaction provided by phone-in segments of live, interactive telecasts already met the interaction needs which audio-teleconferences can provide.

Reasons as to the success of live, interactive television currently are inferential at best. Catchpole (1986) has stressed that, since live, interactive television courses use regular instructors, adequate training in the move from classroom to television studio is critical. The notion of enhanced communication (e.g. Keegan, 1980; Daniel and Marquis. 1980: and Holmberg, 1985) may prove to be another significant factor. Shale (1987) has noted that

"... as various technologies evolve to a point where they support better two-way communication and allow students to interact in the instructional process, they will come to occupy a more central role." (p.21) In order to gather further data as to salient features of multi-modal distance education courses incorporating live, interactive television the following case study was undertaken. As Bates (1981) and Prosser (1984) have argued case studies are, at this phase in the evolution of distance education, valid and are critical in the pin-pointing of key variables to examine using more rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental techniques.

Method

Subjects The subjects were 92 respondents to a questionaire mailed to 138 students who enrolled from their homes in an Introductory Psychology televised course. The 138 students came from 55 communities in British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon. Students who enrolled from the North Island College region (approximately four percent of the Knowledge Network television coverage area) were not included in the study since the college provides additional services (local learning centres and tutors) not available to the other 138 registrants. Kemberand Dekkers (1987) have recently addressed this local study centre issue.

Materials and Procedure Students enrolled in the course by watching a "live" introductory preview/registration telecast (calling in if they had questions)- and mailing in the course fee. They then received, by mail, a print package containing a text, study guide, student manual and pacing schedule. Each week they could tune into the telecast. The telecasts alternated between "live" instructor-hosted (and produced) presentations incorporating lecture, guest interview and phone-in segments and, on alternate weeks, instructor-hosted pre-recorded, in-depth interviews with guest experts. In addition to toll-free telephone access during the telecasts students could call their instructor/tutor toll-free at his office at any time during the sixteen week course. Students also were advised to watch the series Understanding Human Behavior. These 30 minute tapes were played on Knowledge Network at the rate of one per week and covered text material. The tapes are produced by Coastline Community College in California and utilize high production values.

The questionaire (see Appendix A) was mailed to all 138 students along with a stamped envelope addressed to a North Island College director. Included with

the questionaire was a letter from the instructor/tutor encouraging students to return the questionaire as quickly as possible and thanking them for their participation. Questionaires were mailed out four weeks after the final telecast (i.e. 20 weeks after registration).

Results and Discussion

A number of interesting factors emerged in the questionaire results (see Appendix A). Firstly, the results of Questions 1-3 indicated that a majority of students (52%) enrolled for general interest with a further 19 percent switching from credit to general interest. This high rate of general interest registrations is interesting since distance education courses not incorporating live-interactive television attract very few non-credit enrollments. Clearly the big plus here (and this point is bolstered by Nielsen survey data indicating that a further 15,000 to 18,000 people tuned in to the weekly telecasts without registering) is that the addition of television attracted many more students than do print plus telephone distance education delivery systems. Interestingly several of the credit registrants, at the time of registration, indicated that they had followed along with the programs the previous year and now were sending in the course fee to "try the course for credit this time". Question 4 responses relate to this point with "self-improvement" being the most popular reason for enrolling. Only 19% of students cited "University transfer" as their primary reason for enrolling.

Results from Questions 5 and 6 indicated that 59% of students thought they would be unable to take a similar course locally. In fact, British Columbia's Open Learning Institute offers a very similar course via a print plus telephone tutor delivery system anywhere in the province. Question 5 responses suggest that the majority of registrants were unaware of this option. The relatively

higher profile of television may have been a factor here. Those who responded that a similar course was available locally (see Question 6) cited a wide variety of reasons for taking the course via television. Travel and childcare problems as well as convenience and lesser expense were among the reasons mentioned.

Question 7 was designed to assess the effectiveness of the various strategies used to advertise the course. Among these were posters sent to all 14 regional colleges in B.C. and a 60 second instructor-hosted, promotional spot which ran roughly twice a day on the Knowledge Network for three weeks before the first class. Results showed the Knowledge Network ad to be far and away the most effective means of advertising the course.

Questions 9 to 11 looked at how many of the telecasts students watched and whether they recorded them. Seventy-four percent watched ten or more telecasts. Thirty-three percent video-taped four or more telecasts (the question was poorly constructed and should have listed zero as a separate choice) and eighteen percent of students audio-taped the telecasts. Increasing availability of VCR's will presumably increase the number of students who video-tape teleclasses.

Forty-seven percent (see Questions 12-15) of students had a friend, not registered in the course, who also watched some of the telecasts. The signal quality was rated as "Same", "Better" or "Much Better" than other channels by 97% of respondents. Over 95% of respondents also watched other Knowledge Network programming.

Questions 15-19 were designed to assess students' reactions to the live phone-in portion of the telecasts as well as reaction to toll-free telephone contact with the instructor/tutor at his office. Forty percent of students who answered Question 15 felt the live phone-in segment was not important to course

completion. Fifty-nine percent felt it was. Forty-two percent of registrants did try to call in one or more times on-air and 20 percent were successful. The fact that only half of students who tried to get through by telephone on-air were successful was probably because any viewer (registrant or not) was welcome to phone in to the live discussion groups. Since non-registered viewers are, after all, also learners this seemed only fair. Those students who didn't phone felt "too nervous" while others mentioned that they "enjoyed hearing comments from other students". If as, other distance educators (e.g. Holmberg, 1985) have suggested, isolation is a problem for some distance learners the chance to hear one's classmates and perhaps do a little social comparison may have been a key function of the phone-in. Students varied considerably in their enjoyment of the live phone-in discussion groups (Question 19). Forty-three percent said they enjoyed the phone-in "Much" or "Very Much", nineteen percent said "Little" (one percent "Very Little") and thirty-six percent said "Average". Positive comments included "classroom atmosphere break down isolation" and "good to see how others were reacting to the course" while a negative comment was "time could have been better spent on interviews and instruction". Perhaps individual differences in Murray's concept of "need for affiliation" (see Persons and Catchpole, 1987) plays a role here. Particularly interesting was a student who said he/she "didn't phone, but my questions were asked and answered". As is often reported in traditional classes, a single student's question or comment is often on the mind of many others in the class.

Questions 20 to 29 were designed to solicit feedback about the various course components. Overall course design was rated "Excellent" or "Good" by 91 percent of respondents. The printed materials (text, study guide, student manual and pacing schedule) were rated "Good" or "Excellent" by 92% of respondents. The pre-produced Coast Community College "Understanding Human Behavior" tapes were

given these same two ratings by 76 percent of students. The live classes were rated "Good" or "Excellent" by 93 percent of students and the instructor-hosted pre-recorded interviews by 87 percent. When asked to rank the various course components (Question 24) the live classes were rated most useful to learning (48 percent) with the text second (36 percent), instructor-hosted pre-recorded interviews third (10 precent) followed by the Understanding Human Behavior tapes (6 percent) and the Study Guide (0%). In light of the very low production costs of the instructor-hosted live and pre-recorded programs (especially in comparison with the very high budget and elaborate Understanding Human Behavior tapes) it would appear that instructor/student contact was perceived as much more important to learning than an elaborate and expensive video presentation. In this regard, responses to Question 23 indicated that were all course components available (print package, telephone access to tutor and Understanding Human Behavior video-tapes), except the weekly instructor-hosted programs, ninety percent of students reported they would have learned "Not as Much" or "Not Nearly as Much" while when asked how they would have enjoyed the course ninety-five percent said "Not as Much" or "Not Nearly as Much".

Questions 30 to 35 were designed to solicit further feedback on students' experience and again response was positive. Among comments to these questions were "Gives confidence to return to school situation", "Surprised to find I still have scholastic ability", "T.V. eliminates isolated feeling - more personal" and "Feel you know instructor, encouraging and accessible".

Conclusions

Positive student feedback to an integrated distance education course incorporating live-interactive television indicates that, if feasible, such television is worth adding as a course component. Reduced feelings of isolation,

more pleasure in taking an at-home course and enhancement of the personal relationship between student and instructor/tutor are among the benefits of a live television course component. The results of this survey further indicate that this enhancement of the student - instructor/tutor relationship is a more important motivational and learning factor than a high budget and elaborate television production.

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Appendix A

A REPORT ON THE NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE COURSE INTRODUCTORY PSYCHOLOGY AS OFFERED VIA THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

A questionaire was sent out to all 138 students from outside the NIC region who signed up for the course. The summary of the 93 responses received was as follows:

QUESTION 1

Did you originally enroll in the course for Credit or General Interest?

CREDIT: 48%
GENERAL INTEREST: 52%

No Answer: 3%

QUESTION 2

Did you originally plan to take the course for Credit and subsequently switch to General Interest?

YES: 19%
NO: 78%

No Answer: 3%

QUESTION 3

If your answer was Yes, was the reason:

a) course too hard: 5%
b) course too easy: 5%
c) change in family circumstance: 29%
d) illness: 24%
e) other: 41%

No Answer: 75%

* some gave more than one response

QUESTION 4

Why did you register for the course?

a) University Transfer: 19%
b) General Interest: 38%
c) self-improvement: 42%
d) personal challenge: 25%
e) other: 6%

* some gave more than one response

QUESTION 5

If the course was not available via the Knowledge Network, would it be possible for you to take a similar course locally?

YES: 32%
NO: 59%
Probably Yes: 8%

(QUESTION 5 cont'd)

Comments: College underfunded, lack of interest in courses, few courses.
Transportation, travel time - too costly.
Incapacitated.
Expense - unable to attend college.
Quality of program.
Small children/commitments at home.
Can learn at own pace.

QUESTION 6

If your answer to Number 5 was Yes, why did you take the Knowledge Network course?

Comments: Convenience/time available.
Transportation/travel time.
Children/homemaking.
Unable/not likely to attend university.
Can be video-taped.
Quality of course/instructor.
KNOW more "involved."
Took other KNOW courses before.
Can't concentrate in night classes.
Telephone segments.
Didn't know about local course yet.
Learn at own pace.
Expense.
Can be shared with a friend.
Seniors/unemployed something to do.
Not that serious about the course.
Class at university full.

QUESTION 7

How did you hear about the course?

a) saw a poster: 1%
b) saw promotional spot on Knowledge Network: 63%
c) via local college: 4%
d) tuned in to first program by chance: 10%
e) told by a friend: 10%
f) other: 10%

No Answer: 2%

QUESTION 8

How many of the television broadcasts did you see?

0 - 3: 9%
4 - 6: 9%
7 - 9: 8%
10 - 12: 16%
13 - 15: 58%

QUESTION 9

How many of the programs did you have video-taped for viewing at a later time?

0 - 3: 67%
4 - 6: 9%
7 - 9: 3%
10 - 12: 6%
13 - 15: 15%

QUESTION 10

If you video-taped any of the programs, how many did you watch more than once?

0 - 3: 87%
4 - 6: 6%
7 - 9: 1%
10 - 12: 3%
13 - 15: 0%

QUESTION 11

How many of the programs did you tape-record (audio)?

0 - 3: 81%
4 - 6: 3%
7 - 9: 1%
10 - 12: 2%
13 - 15: 12%

QUESTION 12

How many of your friends who are not registered in the course do you know of who watch the broadcast? Number of friends:

0: 53%
1: 20%
2: 18%
3: 4%
4: 2%
5: 1%

QUESTION 13

How did the technical quality of the programs (picture, sound, etc.) compare to the other channels you watch?

Much Better: 11%
Better: 18%
Same: 68%
Poorer: 2%
Much Poorer: 0%

No Answer: 2%

QUESTION 14

Approximately how many hours per week do you watch the Knowledge Network?

0 hours: 1%
1 - 5: 44%
5 - 10: 44%
10 - 15: 3%
over 15: 3%
all TV viewing: 2%

No Answer: 3%

QUESTION 15

If you took the course for credit, how important was the live/interactive phone-in portion of the program to your completion of the course?

Very Important: 19%
Important: 40%
Not Important: 40%

No Answer: 48%

QUESTION 16

How many times did you try to phone-in to the live programs?

0: 55%
1: 8%
2: 23%
3: 6%
4: 4%
10: 1%

No Answer: 11%

QUESTION 17

How many times did you speak to the instructor live on-air?

0: 78%
1: 11%
2: 8%
10: 1%

No Answer: 12%

Comments: A learning experience in itself.
Enjoyed hearing comments form other students.
Too nervous to phone.
Important for credit students.

QUESTION 18

How many times did you call the instructor at his office or did he call you at home?

0: 48%
1-3: 26%
4-6: 18%
7-10: 4%

No Answer: 13%

(QUESTION 18 cont'd)

Comments: Wrote instead, received instant reply.
Personal; a positive incentive.
Encouraging; it was clear he was always available.
Appreciated getting to talk about exam.
Instructor was very helpful.

QUESTION 19

Did you enjoy the phone-in portions of the programs?

Very Much: 18%
Much: 25%
Average: 36%
Little: 19%
Very Little: 1%

No Answer: 9%

Comments: Didn't phone, but my questions were asked and answered.
Classroom atmosphere breaks down isolation.
Enlightening; provides better understanding of topic.
Time could have been better spent on interviews and instruction.
Important part of course.
Enjoyed hearing and comparing views with other students.
Video-taped the show, so no opportunity to phone.
Good to see how others were reacting to the course.

QUESTION 20

Overall, how well set out was the course design? (books, pacing schedules, TV broadcasts, etc.)

Excellent: 60%
Good: 31%
Satisfactory: 6%
Fair: 2%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 10%

(QUESTION 20 cont'd)

Comments: Pacing/study guide valuable.
Dr. Catchpole enjoyable: kept to text and terms.
Moves too quickly; course could be longer.
"Flowed" well, well written.
No improvements to suggest.
Would like extra week before final exam.

QUESTION 21

How would you rate the quality of printed materials?

Excellent: 56%
Good: 36%
Satisfactory: 7%
Fair: 0%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 5%

Comments: Interesting, readable, understandable and amusing.
Impressed with detail.
Good reading list.
Are Canadian Psychology texts available?
Text/Workbook numbers should match Chapter/Lesson numbers.
Some unnecessary reading material.

QUESTION 22

How would you rate the quality of the Understanding Human Behaviour video-tapes played in the 30-minute slot after the class?

Excellent: 30%
Good: 46%
Satisfactory: 7%
Fair: 2%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 10%

(QUESTION 22 cont'd)

Comments: Entertaining, interesting, practical.
Integrated with book and lesson.
Summary helpful.
More time with instructor rather than tapes.

QUESTION 23

If the course was available with all the same course components (books, Understanding Human Behaviour video-tapes, telephone access to a tutor) but none of Dr. Catchpole's programs:

a) would you have learned

Just as Much: 0%
Almost as Much: 8%
Not as Much: 43%
Not Nearly as Much: 47%

No Answer: 9%

b) would you have enjoyed the course

Just as Much: 1%
Almost as Much: 2%
Not as Much: 33%
Not Nearly as Much: 62%

No Answer: 9%

QUESTION 24

Which course component did you learn the most from?

Live Classes: 48%
Pre-recorded Interviews: 10%
Text: 36%
Study Guide: 0%
Understanding Human Behaviour Tapes: 6%

No Answer: 10%

QUESTION 25

How would you rate the quality of the pre-taped interviews with other psychologists/doctors?

Excellent: 38%
Good: 49%
Satisfactory: 11%
Fair: 1%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 9%

Comments: Good to hear views of other professionals.
Informative, interesting, practical, relevant.
Useful aid in learning: felt included in interview.
Some guests more relevant/interesting than others.
Dr. Catchpole an excellent interviewer.

QUESTION 26

How would you rate the quality of the live sessions?

Excellent: 49%
Good: 44%
Satisfactory: 6%
Fair: 0%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 10%

Comments: Informative: good to have another interpretation of text.
Appreciated breaks.
Most valuable part of course; excellently presented.
More time needed for greater detail.
Dr. Catchpole made understanding text easy; communicated well and with enthusiasm.

QUESTION 27

How would you rate the quality of the live phone-in discussions?

Excellent: 12%
Good: 37%
Satisfactory: 53%
Fair: 14%
Poor: 2%

No Answer: 11%

Comments: Interesting to hear other views.
Tactful, respectful, courteous treatment of views.
Dr. Catchpole's questions stimulating.
Enjoyed humour.
Give topic a week in advance - time to think.
Sound delay disconcerting.
Some callers off-subject, long-winded. Screening?
Sound delay disconcerting.

QUESTION 28

How would you rate the quality of the exams? (Credit Students Only)

Excellent: 20%
Good: 51%
Satisfactory: 5%
Fair: 5%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 55%

Comments: Good choice of essay topics.
Fair; time sufficient; asked relevant questions; covered material.
Excellent format.
Smaller tests on fewer chapters?
Ask more questions.

QUESTION 29

How would you rate the quality of the papers? (Credit Students Only)

Excellent: 27%
Good: 52%
Satisfactory: 18%
Fair: 0%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 55%

Comments: Excellent in furthering topic/text material.
Would have liked more guidance in this area.
Challenging; gives a feeling of accomplishment.
Make course longer - more time to research and study.
Enjoyed and learned a good deal from essays.
Some topics lacked substance - more choices?
Lack of reference books a drawback.

QUESTION 30

Compared to other instructor/teachers you've had, how would you rate the instructor for this course?

Top 10%: 75%
Top 30%: 17%
Average: 6%
Bottom 30%: 0%
Bottom 10%: 0%

No Answer: 17%

Comments: Reason I took the course.
Better than university professors.
Sense of humour, patient, encouraging, wants students to understand, interested in subject.
Felt he valued me as a student, had time for my questions.
Commanded attention; interesting, professional, personal.
Good at drawing out relevant comments at phone-in.
Always available, calls back.

QUESTION 31

Compared to a normal "in the flesh" class," how would you rate this course as offered via the Knowledge Network?

Excellent: 45%
Good: 46%
Satisfactory: 7%
Fair: 0%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 12%

Comments: More relaxed; better than classroom.
Miss other students, interacting, spontenaity.
More time to concentrate (no travel, other students).
Next best thing to class.
Better marks; involved without stress or competition.
Gives confidence to return to school situation.

QUESTION 32

Would you recommend this course to a friend?

Definitely: 80%
Probably: 19%
Perhaps: 1%
No: 0%

No Answer: 9%

Comments: Have recommended it already.
Depends on friend's interests.
Not everyone can get the program (TV convertors)
Fine course, excellent quality - would recommend it without hesitation.
Friends found my work impressive.
Course needs more/better publicity.
Good course for general public - for understanding of ourselves and each other.

QUESTION 33

How would you rate the difficulty of the course?

Very Difficult: 1%
Difficult: 40%
Average: 49%
Easy: 6%
Very Easy: 2%

No Answer: 13%

Comments: Depends on effort put in to work.
Difficult due to age/time away from school.
Interesting and fun, work seems easier.
More lesson hours needed to cover material.
Challenging.
Less stress makes work easier.
Must work hard for good marks.
Previous study of subject.
No previous study, but desire to continue in subject.
Motivated by difficulty; enjoyed course and studied more.

QUESTION 34

As an overall learning experience, how would you rate this course?

Excellent: 59%
Good: 31%
Satisfactory: 8%
Fair: 0%
Poor: 0%

No Answer: 11%

Comments: Practical benefit.
Positive feeling about learning.
Stimulated interest in subject.
Helpful in understanding common media topics.
Understand self, career opportunities, psychology.
Arrange mail order library with university?
Surprised to find that I still have scholastic ability.
Expanded horizons more than any other course.

QUESTION 35

If you have taken other correspondence courses, how does this one compare?

Much Better: 46%
Better: 44%
Same: 10%
Poorer: 0%
Much Poorer: 0%

No Answer: 54%

Comments: TV eliminates isolated feeling - more personal.
Better for self-motivation.
Feel you know the instructor; encouraging and accessible.
Evokes enthusiasm for learning.
Less reading and "drudgery" - video makes the difference.
Can't procrastinate - encouraged to be ready for next lesson.